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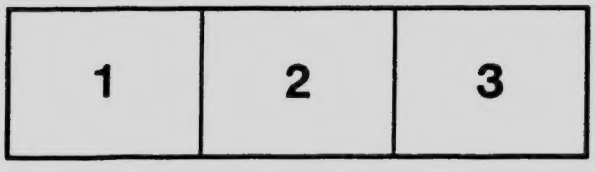

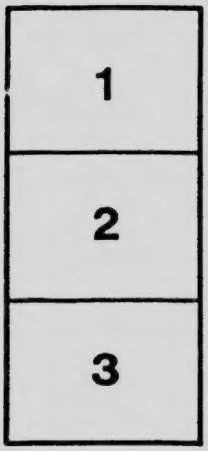

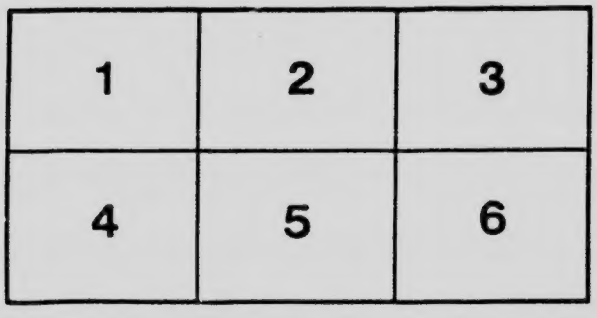

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PEACE RIVER DISTRICT.

* Report of H. E. Walker, B.S.A., District Agriculturist.

Possible Routes.—The British Columbia Peace River District can be reached in the following ways:—

(a.) By boat or canoe from Summit Lake (north of Fort George) down-stream through the Rockies by the Crooked River, McLeod Lake, and Parsnip River into the Peace, with a fourteen-mile portage near Hudson Hope. The distance from Summit Lake to Hudson Hope is approximately 225 miles:

(b.) By trail from Spirit River to Pouce Coupe, a distance of sixty-five miles; impassable for auto:

(c.) By road from Grande Prairie, Alta., 100 miles to Pouce Coupe, which road is possible for auto during most of the summer and fall:

(d.) Or by steamboat or gasolene-launch from Peace River Crossing, a distance of 270 miles to Fort St. John. This trip can be made until September, when boats cease to ply. From experience gained during my recent tour I would recommend the latter as the best way to reach the Dominion Block, having team meet one at the Cutbank River to drive into the Pouce Coupe District, a distance of twenty-eight miles.

Route travelled.—In making arrangements for a survey of this district it was my intention to have travelled down-stream from Summit Lake via Finlay Forks. I was, however, unable to accompany the party as first intended, and as subsequent parties were planning to leave later than was suitable for my purpose, I decided that the most economical way, from the standpoint of both time and money, would be via Alberta. Consequently, I left Prince George for Edmonton on August 9th, and by the 11th reached Spirit River. This point is sixty-five miles from Pouce Coupe, and while it is used as a winter shipping-point, there is comparatively little travel during the summer months, and I therefore found some little difficulty in making suitable arrangements to get across country, and three days' delay was caused. I was eventually driven over by Mr. R. Heddle, of Spirit River, who was engaged boring wells in the Pouce Coupe Valley.

Pouce Coupe.—August 17th I arrived at Pouce Coupe (meaning Cut-thumb), which was found to be a place principally in name, one store and post-office, a bank, a telegraph-office, and a road-house comprising "the place." As I found that the main settlement was immediately to the north of this point, I decided that my best plan would be to spend considerable of the time available in visiting the settlers of the district.

Number filed.—Up to June, 1917, 652 homesteads had been filed on in the Pouce Coupe Valley. Of the number filing, approximately 150 are at the present time out of the country for various reasons, principal of which are enlistment with the Forces and inability "to make things go." This leaves 500 men on the land, of which number about 350 are married.

Population.—The total population of this section is around 1,200, 60 per cent. of whom are American, the remainder being French, Canadian, Swede, English, etc.

Type of Settler.—The average settler is of an excellent type, though there are a number of "drifters," which is inevitable in a new section; but, taken as a whole, the man on the land in this district, given a reasonable opportunity, will make a success of farming.

* This report deals with conditions as found in the summer of 1917.

A Prairie Country.—There is in the Pouce Coupe Valley a fairly open prairie approximately twenty miles north to south by twelve miles east to west. On this prairie the average homesteader can plough 100 acres with practically no clearing, or at the most very light clearing. The open land is covered with natural prairie-grasses and some little vetch and peavine.

Topography.—The land is of a rolling character, with gentle slopes to the banks of the creeks, but these banks are always steep and high. It is characteristic of the Peace River country that wherever a river or creek is found the adjacent plateau is anywhere between 100 and 800 feet above the bed of the river or creek. This fact tends to make road-building a real problem.

Loooking north over Saskatoon Creek, Pouce Coupe Prairie, Peace River Block, B.C.

Looking towards Dawson Creek, Pouce Coupe Valley, Peace River Block, B.C.

Natural Growth.—The rolling prairie is bounded on the south and west by a series of low hills, some of which are bare, but most of them are thickly covered with timber, mainly poplar from 4 to 10 inches in diameter. There is also some spruce and willow. The soil on these hills is for the most part good.

Soil.—The soil in the Pouce Coupe District is good, there being 2 to 6 inches of rich black loam found over from 1 to 2 feet of clay loam. This in turn is underlayed with 20 feet or more of clay. Comparatively few stones are found.

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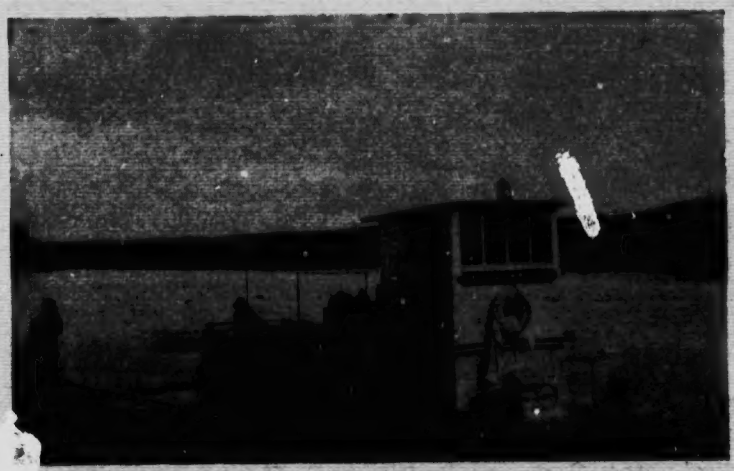
Roads.—The roads, where found, are of the ordinary prairie nature—excellent in summer, but very indifferent in the spring and wet weather; though, as previously mentioned, the very deep creeks will continue to make hauling difficult until some definite work is done at the various crossings. The long, heavy grades from the creek-bed again to the general level easily reduce the hauling capacity of a team by 60 per cent.

Acreage.—An attempt was made to obtain figures as to the exact acreage under crop. In the time available it was impossible to visit all farmers. In any case, the compiling of exact statistics is always rendered difficult, due to the fact that so many men are suspicious that some attempt is being made for taxing purposes; others are inclined to very much "boost" or "knock"; while still others seem to show stupidity as to what is the size of an acre field. As near as could be estimated by myself, and in consultation with Mr. Cruickshanks, manager of the branch of the Bank of Commerce, the following acres are under crop in Pouce Coupe Valley, 1917:—

Oats, 7,000 acres, average yield 40 bushels; wheat, 5,000 acres, average yield 25 bushels; barley, 300 acres; potatoes, roots, etc. This will give a total yield of 280,000 bushels of oats, 125,000 of wheat, and 60,000 of barley.



Launch at Hudson Hope, just arrived from Peace River Crossing.

Rivers and Creeks.—The Pouce Coupe River runs north in a general direction, leaving the Dominion Block east of Rolla. Various creeks flow into the river in a general easterly direction. They are as follows: Bissell, Dawson, Saskatoon, Rock, and Doe Creeks. At the north part of the Pouce Coupe Valley the banks are 500 to 600 feet deep.

FORT ST. JOHN AND TAYLOR'S FLAT.

In and about the centre of the Dominion Block and situated on the north bank of the Peace River is found the Hudson's Bay Company trading-post of Fort St. John. There are also a few other buildings at this point, as the Dominion Telegraph Office, Revillon's store, and the Police Barracks (across the river). Eight miles down the river is a small flat, of about three sections in extent, known as Taylor's Flat, and eight settlers may be found there.

North and east of Fort St. John is a very good type of district, which is reached by an alleged road which rises 800 feet in half a mile. A large number of homesteads have been filed on this plateau, but only six settlers at the present time remain, and one is inclined to ask "why" they stay under the conditions as they now exist, as they are over 275 miles from the nearest shipping-point (Peace River Crossing), with no immediate relief in sight.

Plateau, Soil, and Grasses.—The plateau is a semi-open country of great extent, the wooded portions being covered principally with small willows, also some poplar and spruce. The district is not nearly so open as the Pouce Coupe Valley, but the soil is more fertile and the vegetation is more luxuriant, and, despite two dry seasons, the vegetation at the time of my visit (September, 1917) varied in height from 3 to 5 feet, was exceedingly thick, and consisted of rye-grass, couch-grass, red-top, fringed brome, vetches, and some little peavine. This stretch of country extends to the eastern side of the Dominion Block with various breaks; north, to above the northern boundary of the Block, with considerable open land on and around Indian

Peace River, B.C. "The Gates," from the west.

Cattle on E. P. Borden's Ranch, Swan Lake, Peace River, B.C.

Reserve No. 172 near Charlie Lake; and west, to about Cache Creek, with some stretches of timbered land, principally spruce, as, for example, the land around Charlie Lake.

Soil, etc.—The soil consists of from 6 to 12 inches of mould on a subsoil of clay loam, gradually giving place to a heavy clay formation at about 2 feet deep. This country is slightly rolling, with low hills around Charlie Lake. At places there is a considerable outcropping of rocks, some limestone. The altitude of this plateau varies from 2,100 to 2,400 feet.

There is no doubt that in the future this will be a very good section, but at the present time it is "impossible."

Acreage.—At the present time there are 100 acres in crop, mainly oats, around Fort St. John and Taylor's Flat.

HUDSON HOPE.

Hudson Hope, another H.B.C. trading-post, is situated at the eastern boundary of the foot-hills of the Rockies. The altitude here is 1,522 feet. The soil in the immediate district is a light sandy loam, with a gravel subsoil which often outcrops. The principal tree-growth is jack-pine. To the north the good land is very scattered

"Police Barracks" (Chief H. Taylor), Fort St. John, Peace River District, B.C.

Homesteader's cabin, Saskatoon Creek, Ponce Coupe Prairie, B.C.

and scarce, being altogether confined to "draws" covered with poplar and some spruce. Many of these are apparently old lake-bottoms and the soil is an excellent loam anywhere over 1 foot deep. These "draws" are surrounded with high jack-pine ridges and are very subject to frost.

Muskeg.—Much of the land to the north of Hudson Hope is of a muskeg formation, needing drainage, etc. To the south there is some good land around Moberly Lake, but this is principally reserved for the Indians. There is also much muskeg

between the lake and Hudson Hope. The hills near Moberly Lake are well grassed, and in places the soil is good. There is reported to be good soil along Moberly River, but this section was not visited by me. Jack-pine and muskeg, however, appear to predominate in this section.

Coal.—Excellent coalfields are found west of Hudson Hope—some also claim gold—and south-west of this point, over the Peace River, is a limestone outcrop.

Water-power.—There is almost unlimited water-power in the canyon of the Peace River at Hudson Hope, the water falling 245 feet in a distance of fourteen miles, and no doubt in the distant future this fall will be the means of supplying power for the whole of the Peace River District—Alberta as well as British Columbia.

This section (Hudson Hope) for agricultural purposes is of very little account, especially for immediate use.

View of the Peace River, with Fort St. John in the distance, Peace River Block, B.C.

GENERAL NOTES.

Live Stock.

Cattle.—A total of approximately 1,500 cattle are to be found in the Peace River District of British Columbia, E. P. Borden (Swan Lake) having 195 head; John Taylor (Rolla), 45 head; Pollard, 65; Abel, 100; the remainder being principally owned in smaller quantities. There are 20 head at Fort St. John and 12 head at Hudson Hope.

Type.—The type of cattle kept is of a very indifferent class, with the exception of those owned by E. P. Borden, who possesses a few pure-bred Shorthorns and a very good Shorthorn bull, and whose general class of cattle is a high-grade Shorthorn.

Two young bulls, imported under the Dominion scheme, were brought into the Pouce Coupe District (Rolla) this last spring. They are only of a fair type of Shorthorn.

Horses.—The number of horses is large, but I would not make any guess as to the number. They are principally of the cayuse type.

Wintering.—It is necessary to feed cattle for about six months during the winter in most parts of the district, though Mr. E. P. Borden, who is situated on Swan Lake, twelve miles south of the Dominion Block, advised me that he usually takes his cattle up about December 1st and has had them on range always by April 1st. Mr. Borden has been in the district six years. During the winter he feeds his cattle hay in the bush near the buildings, not housing them at any time.

Winter Out.—With reference to horses, in all parts of the Peace River I find that horses "winter out" and come through in good shape, being able to paw their way through the snow to the feed below, of which there is an abundance.

All live stock do well, but in the Dominion Block this industry cannot be developed to any great extent by the individual, due to the fact that it is only possible for him to homestead one quarter-section. To the north and east of Fort St. John there is almost unlimited summer range for large herds of cattle, but, as the same conditions prevail as to land-settlement, it would be impossible to obtain sufficient area unless a person was able to lease a large tract of land for a number of years. A few tracts are already leased for this purpose, notably one held by Tremblay's Ranch, near Pouce Coupe.

Climate.

No records have been kept of rainfall and temperatures in the Pouce Coupe District, and the only figures I could find available in the Peace River country were those obtainable from Mr. McDougall, manager of the H.B.C. post at Hudson Hope.

Looking over Hudson Hope from the north [illegible].

These records have been kept for the last eighteen months for the Dominion Meteorological Service, and can therefore be assumed to be correct. They are as follows:—

1916.	Total Precipitation.	1917.	Total Precipitation.
April	0.23*	January	0.81†
May	0.96*	February	1.00‡
June	0.62*	March	0.95†
July	4.20*	April	0.82‡
August	0.90*	May	3.50*
September	1.48*	June	2.27*
October	0.07†	July	1.74*
November	1.10†	August	2.00*
December	0.50†	September	0.08*

Taking the twelve months, September, 1916, to August, 1917, this gives a total precipitation for the twelve months of almost 17 inches. (Snow in each case has been reduced to rain figures by melting.)

High.—The highest temperatures recorded were: 87 degrees, July 18th, 1917; 92 degrees, August 26th, 1916.

* Rain. † Snow. ‡ Snow and rain.

Low.—The lowest temperatures recorded were: 42 degrees below zero, December, 1916; 55 degrees below zero, January 31st, 1917. Twenty-five below zero appears to be a fairly common low temperature during the months of December, January, or February.

Dry Seasons.—The last two seasons are reported as being exceptionally dry, and, judging from the above, this statement is no doubt true.

Frosts.—The question of summer frosts is a vital one throughout the whole of the Peace River District. During 1917 no damaging frost occurred until September 1st, when most of the wheat was out of danger. The season of 1916, however, was disastrous, the greater percentage of the crop being frozen. Varying success attended the efforts put forth in 1915, and good crops are claimed for 1914. After the summer frosts, ideal falls are usually experienced until December. To the south of the Block, Mr. E. P. Borden reports that last year (1916) was the only year during the six that he has been in the district that potatoes were frozen on his farm during the summer.

Seeding.—Seeding operations commence early in April.

Transportation.

The question of transportation is one of the most vital problems of the whole British Columbia Peace River country. At the present time the farmer who is nearest to the railroad is sixty miles away from one.

Horses and barn, owned by J. Taylor, Rolla, Peace River Block, B.C.

Railroad.—The Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway is operating from Edmonton to Spirit River and Grande Prairie, both of which towns are in Alberta. The settlers of Pouce Coupe use Grande Prairie as their summer centre and Spirit River as the winter shipping-point. The respective distances are 100 miles and 165 miles from Pouce Coupe post-office, and the majority of the settlers are north or west from this point, some as far distant as twenty miles.

The Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway is graded from Spirit River for a distance of sixty miles to the British Columbia boundary, but the steel is not laid. The contract was let for the said steel twelve months ago, but later it was requisitioned by the Government, and it would appear that there is no possibility of the steel being laid until after the war.

Less Crop.—In the meantime the district will remain at a great disadvantage, and there is no doubt that less acreage will be seeded, rather than more, during the coming seasons, due to this lack of transportation facilities.

Throughout the whole district the keenest interest is evidenced in this question of railroads, and I found that the main call, both from the British Columbia and Alberta districts, is for an outlet to the Pacific; therefore many inquiries were made regarding the possibility of an early construction of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway.

Pacific Outlet.—The necessity of this outlet to the Pacific cannot be stated too strongly, for most of the trade of the Peace River District eventually belongs to British Columbia, and one may get some idea of its possibilities when it can be conservatively stated that, taking the Peace River District as a whole, there is room for 1,000,000 people. An observation of the goods in various stores shows one how many of the staples of life come from Vancouver, but via Edmonton. To enumerate a few, mention might be made of such as tea, sugar, rice, fish, and various other canned goods, etc.

Schools, Churches, etc.

Schools.—Only three public schools are to be found in the Peace River District (B.C.), all of them in the Pouce Coupe Valley. They are situated as follows: Dawson Creek, Saskatoon Creek, and Rolla. There is a possibility of one being opened at Fort St. John in the near future.

Churches.—Anglican and Roman Catholic near Pouce Coupe Post-office, Methodist and Presbyterian at Rolla, and Catholic Missions at Fort St. John and Hudson Hope.

House and barn, owned by J. Taylor, Rolla, Pouce Coupe Valley, Peace River Block, B.C., eighty miles from the railroad.

Hall.—A good-sized public hall is found at Rolla, having been built by the boys of the district—a log building.

Bank.—A branch of the Bank of Commerce is situated at Pouce Coupe.

Telegraph-offices.—The Dominion Telegraph Line runs through the district, and offices are located at Pouce Coupe, Fort St. John, Halfway River, and Hudson Hope.

Post-offices.—Pouce Coupe, having a weekly mail service from Grande Prairie, Alberta; Rolla, weekly service from Pouce Coupe; and Fort St. John and Hudson Hope, having mail leaving Rolla on the first and third Thursdays of the month.

Stores.—General stores at Pouce Coupe and Rolla, in the Pouce Coupe Valley. Stock kept appears to be of a somewhat indifferent character. These are the only stores in this valley, and without a doubt there is an excellent opening for a real live merchant.

Hudson's Bay Company have stores at Fort St. John and Hudson Hope, and Revillon's have a store at Fort St. John. This is a complete list of stores to date.

Police.

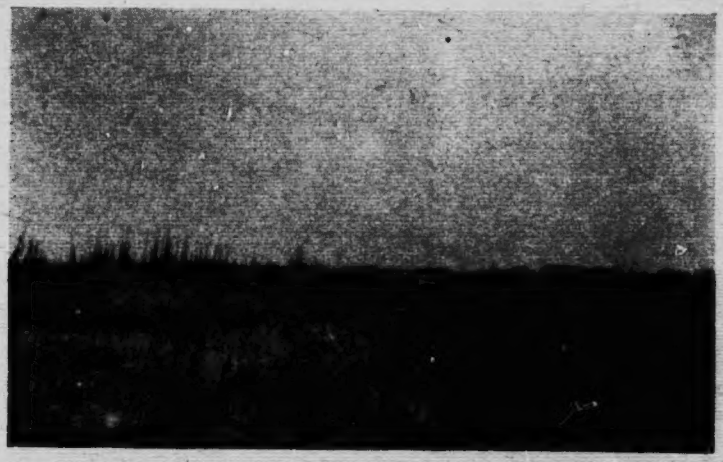
The Provincial police (Chief Taylor) have headquarters at Fort St. John, the barracks being on the opposite side of river to Hudson's Bay Post and Telegraph Office, but is connected by private telephone. There is also a constable in the Pouce Coupe District under Chief Taylor.

Forestry.

Forestry service within the Block comes under the Dominion jurisdiction, and fires, etc., are looked after by their officers. Outside the boundaries of the Block they apparently are not looked after.

Indians.

Quite a number of Indians are found throughout the district, generally being of the useless class. They are very much on the decline, and on the authority of Mr. Beaton, who has been manager for the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort St. John for thirty years, there were in the immediate district around that point over 3,000 when he first went there, and at the present time less than 300 are to be found. This is due to disease.



Maguire's Homestead. Very typical of the district north of Fort St. John, Peace River Block, B.C.

Peace.—Beaver Indians are found to the north of the Peace River and Crees to the south, the river deriving its name as the place where the differences of these two tribes were settled over the pipe of peace.

Water-supply.

Hard Water.—All water in the district is "hard," including that of the Peace River. Some difficulty is found in obtaining water for domestic purposes. North of Fort St. John there is not a well from which it is wise to use the water. In the Pouce Coupe Valley many have to haul all water from one to three miles, but this last season a few wells have been bored, with varying results.

Wells.—On Mr. P. McKinnon's farm, near Saskatoon Creek, a flowing well was struck at 67 feet, and near by another well is only 48 feet, with good water. At the Pouce Coupe Post-office a hole 178 feet deep was bored with no apparent result, while a similar depth on the Zimmerman place produced no water.

The water question is a pressing one throughout the whole Peace River District, and in many places on the Alberta side water is only had in the summer by the damming of spring freshets and by melting snow in winter.

Flies.

Various species of flies (particularly the deer or horse fly and the mosquito) are very numerous in the summer months. Mr. Cadenhead, Halfway River, stated to me that the deer-flies were often so plentiful as to make it impossible to work with horses during certain parts of the summer except in the early morning or late evening. For this reason the fall of the year is much the best time to travel through this country.

Gophers.

To one who is well acquainted with the Prairies, the entire absence of ground animals in this agricultural section is a notable thing, no gophers, etc., being found. I mention this fact, leaving the reason to be assumed.

Trapping.

This section is a rather good game section, and many of the homesteaders make good money trapping or trading with trappers throughout the winter. Bears are particularly plentiful, and reports are to the effect that it is a good fox country.

"Nahnal Meadows." Just east of Pouce Coupe P.O., Peace River country, B.C.

Leader Needed.

One thing that particularly impressed itself upon me, principally in the Pouce Coupe Valley, was the apparent utter absence of a "leader." There appears to be no one man who is able to hold any number of the people together for any purpose, and there would be an excellent opportunity for a wideawake district representative. However, it would seem to be utter nonsense to recommend the appointment of a District Agriculturist until a railroad is advanced into the district, but when such a time comes I feel that such a one could accomplish very much, as there appears to be excellent material upon which to work, and as there are many productive farms something definite could be done.

Along the Peace.

From Hudson Hope to Fort St. John, on the south side of the Peace River, the hills are thickly wooded, but on the north they present alternating patches of open land and woods. A few homesteaders are found at various points, as the Red River, Halfway River, Cache Creek, and Deep Creek, and the soil is excellent at these points, but is confined principally to river-bottoms or first benches. The

plateau is from 700 to 800 feet above the valley, which is from one and a half to three miles wide, the river being from 700 to 1,000 feet wide, with a varying current of from three to seven miles per hour.

West of Hudson Hope there is very little good land for agricultural purposes along the Peace.

CONCLUSION.

An attempt has been made in this report to be as brief as practicable, and to so arrange the subject-matter as to be easy of reference. Only those parts visited are referred to and first-hand information used. Nearly all notes refer to land lying in the Dominion Block of the Peace River District, there being little settlement elsewhere, with the exception of Tate Creek, south of the Block.

Before concluding, I wish to place on record my keen appreciation of help given me during my trip by the following gentlemen: Mr. R. Cruikshanks, manager of the Pouce Coupe Branch, Bank of Commerce; Mr. R. Heddle, who extended hospitality to the extent of driving me, by buckboard, the sixty-five miles from Spirit River to Pouce Coupe, and otherwise made my visit pleasant; Mr. Menard, district road foreman; Mr. McCartney, Dominion telegraph operator; and Chief of Police Taylor, who was "hospitality personified" at Fort St. John, and gave me valuable assistance in this most northerly part of my district; and to the very many who added much profit and pleasure to my tour and rendered me every help possible.

There is no doubt in my mind that in the future—it would be folly to predict how soon—this section of British Columbia will be an excellent mixed-farming and revenue-producing district. From the standpoint of agriculture, mixed farming here, as in many other parts, is the ideal to be kept in view.

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